

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
NORTHERN DIVISION

ANTHONY THREATT,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 2:10-cv-335

v.

Honorable R. Allan Edgar

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF
CORRECTIONS PAROLE BOARD,

Defendant.

**OPINION DENYING LEAVE
TO PROCEED *IN FORMA PAUPERIS* - THREE STRIKES**

Plaintiff Anthony Threatt, a prisoner incarcerated at Baraga Maximum Correctional Facility (AMF), filed a complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Plaintiff seeks leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. Because Plaintiff has filed at least three lawsuits that were dismissed as frivolous, malicious or for failure to state a claim, he is barred from proceeding *in forma pauperis* under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). The Court will order Plaintiff to pay the \$350.00 civil action filing fee within twenty-eight (28) days of this opinion and accompanying order, and if Plaintiff fails to do so, the Court will order that his action be dismissed without prejudice. Even if the case is dismissed, Plaintiff will be responsible for payment of the \$350.00 filing fee in accordance with *In re Alea*, 286 F.3d 378, 380-81 (6th Cir. 2002).

Discussion

The Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA), Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996), which was enacted on April 26, 1996, amended the procedural rules governing a prisoner's

request for the privilege of proceeding *in forma pauperis*. As the Sixth Circuit has stated, the PLRA was “aimed at the skyrocketing numbers of claims filed by prisoners – many of which are meritless – and the corresponding burden those filings have placed on the federal courts.” *Hampton v. Hobbs*, 106 F.3d 1281, 1286 (6th Cir. 1997). For that reason, Congress put into place economic incentives to prompt a prisoner to “stop and think” before filing a complaint. *Id.* For example, a prisoner is liable for the civil action filing fee, and if the prisoner qualifies to proceed *in forma pauperis*, the prisoner may pay the fee through partial payments as outlined in 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b). The constitutionality of the fee requirements of the PLRA has been upheld by the Sixth Circuit. *Id.* at 1288.

In addition, another provision reinforces the “stop and think” aspect of the PLRA by preventing a prisoner from proceeding *in forma pauperis* when the prisoner repeatedly files meritless lawsuits. Known as the “three-strikes” rule, the provision states:

In no event shall a prisoner bring a civil action or appeal a judgment in a civil action or proceeding under [the section governing proceedings *in forma pauperis*] if the prisoner has, on 3 or more prior occasions, while incarcerated or detained in any facility, brought an action or appeal in a court of the United States that was dismissed on the grounds that it is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, unless the prisoner is under imminent danger of serious physical injury.

28 U.S.C. § 1915(g). The statutory restriction “[i]n no event,” found in § 1915(g), is express and unequivocal. The statute does allow an exception for a prisoner who is “under imminent danger of serious physical injury.” The Sixth Circuit has upheld the constitutionality of the “three-strikes” rule against arguments that it violates equal protection, the right of access to the courts, and due process, and that it constitutes a bill of attainder and is *ex post facto* legislation. *Wilson v. Yaklich*, 148 F.3d

596, 604-06 (6th Cir. 1998); *accord Rodriguez v. Cook*, 169 F.3d 1176, 1178-82 (9th Cir. 1999); *Rivera v. Allin*, 144 F.3d 719, 723-26 (11th Cir. 1998); *Carson v. Johnson*, 112 F.3d 818, 821-22 (5th Cir. 1997).

Plaintiff has been an active litigant in the federal courts in Michigan. In more than three of Plaintiff's lawsuits, the Court entered dismissals because the complaints were frivolous or failed to state a claim. *See Threatt v. Ramsey et al.*, No. 2:09-cv-248 (W.D. Mich. Jan. 6, 2010); *Threatt v. Security Classification Committee*, No. 1:07-cv-12817 (E.D. Mich. July 18, 2007); *Threatt v. Birkett et al.*, No. 2:07-cv-11592 (E.D. Mich. Apr. 16, 2007); *Threatt v. Fowley et al.*, No. 1:91-cv-33 (W.D. Mich. Mar. 4, 1991); *Threatt v. Kitchen et al.*, No. 2:91-cv-70336 (E.D. Mich. Feb. 28, 1991). Although two of the dismissals were entered before enactment of the PLRA on April 26, 1996, the dismissals nevertheless count as strikes. *See Wilson*, 148 F.3d at 604. In addition, on at least one occasion, Plaintiff has been denied leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* because he has three strikes. *See, e.g., Threatt v. Capello et al.*, No. 2:10-cv-111 (W.D. Mich. July 19, 2010).

Moreover, Plaintiff's allegations do not fall within the exception to the three-strikes rule because he does not allege any facts establishing that he is under imminent danger of serious physical injury. Congress did not define "imminent danger" in the PLRA, but it is significant that Congress chose to use the word "imminent," a word that conveys the idea of immediacy. "Imminent" is "Near at hand . . . impending; on the point of happening; threatening, menacing, perilous. Something which is threatening to happen at once, something close at hand, something to happen upon the instant . . . and on the point of happening." BLACK'S LAW DICTIONARY, 514-15 (6th ed. 1991). "Imminent" is also defined as "ready to take place, near at hand, impending, hanging threateningly over one's head, menacingly near." WEBSTER'S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL

DICTIONARY, 1130 (1976). “Imminent danger” is “such an appearance of threatened and impending injury as would put a reasonable and prudent man to his instant defense.” BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY, 515 (6th ed. 1991). In a recent decision, the Sixth Circuit recognized the standard adopted by other circuit courts:

While the Sixth Circuit has not defined the term “imminent danger” for purposes of this section, other Circuits have held that to meet the requirement, the threat or prison condition “must be real and proximate” and the danger of serious physical injury must exist at the time the complaint is filed. *See, e.g., Ciarpaglini v. Saini*, 352 F.3d 328, 330 (7th Cir.2003); *Abdul-Akbar v. McKelvie*, 239 F.3d 307, 313 (3d Cir.2001) (en banc). Thus a prisoner’s assertion that he or she faced danger in the past is insufficient to invoke the exception. *Id.* Other Circuits also have held that district courts may deny a prisoner leave to proceed pursuant to § 1915(g) when the prisoner’s claims of imminent danger are “conclusory or ridiculous,” *Ciarpaglini*, 352 F.3d at 331, or are “‘clearly baseless’ (i.e. are fantastic or delusional and rise to the level of ‘irrational or wholly incredible).’” *Gibbs v. Cross*, 160 F.3d 962, 967 (3d Cir.1998) (quoting *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992)).

Rittner v. Kinder, 290 F. App’x 796, 797-98 (6th Cir. 2008).

Similarly, Congress did not define “serious physical injury,” though various courts have interpreted the meaning of the phrase. In *Ibrahim v. District of Columbia*, 464 F.3d 3, 7 (D.C. Cir. 2006), the D.C. Circuit concluded that a “chronic disease that could result in serious harm or even death constitutes ‘serious physical injury.’” *Id.* Similarly, in *Brown v. Johnson*, 387 F.3d 1344, 1350 (11th Cir. 2004), the Eleventh Circuit found that HIV and Hepatitis C, both chronic and potentially fatal diseases, met the “serious physical injury” requirement. Moreover, in *Ciarpaglini v. Saini*, 352 F.3d 328, 330 (7th Cir. 2003), the Seventh Circuit recognized that “heart palpitations, chest pains, labored breathing, choking sensations, and paralysis in . . . legs and back” resulting from a denial of medication constituted a serious physical injury. *Id.* The Eighth Circuit also has addressed the question, concluding that a spreading infection in the mouth that resulted from a lack

of proper dental treatment amounted to a serious physical injury. *McAlphin v. Toney*, 281 F.3d 709, 710 (8th Cir. 2002).

In the instant case, the bulk of Plaintiff's complaint involves allegations that Defendant Michigan Parole Board is relying on false information in his prison file to deny him parole. He contends that unnamed AMF corrections officers on multiple unspecified occasions between 2003 and 2010 have falsely charged Plaintiff with major misconducts, resulting in his continued confinement in a Level V security classification and damaging his likelihood of parole. Plaintiff also makes several conclusory allegations to suggest that he is in imminent danger and living in unsafe prison conditions. First, he claims that if the Court reviews his prison and medical records from 2003 to 2010, the Court would find evidence that the staff at AMF told Plaintiff that "the only way [Plaintiff] was going home was in a box, (meaning dead) and that they were going to make [him] max[] out in/from segregation." (Compl., Page ID #9.) Second, Plaintiff broadly alleges that the staff at AMF do not like him and tried to kill him several times by starving, abusing and torturing him. (Page ID #10.) Plaintiff also suggests that his medical file from 2003 to 2010 will provide proof of his allegations because it will show how much weight he has lost due to the staff's retaliatory acts. (Page ID #11.) Third, he claims that the parole board denied him his right to be interviewed in person, which causes Plaintiff to suffer in prison. (Page ID #13.) Fourth, Plaintiff alleges that on January 7, 2010 another prisoner put a homemade knife on Plaintiff and staff will do nothing about it. (Page ID #14.)

By Plaintiff's own account, the events of which he complains occurred in the past and, thus, are insufficient to invoke the imminent danger exception. In addition, Plaintiff's vague and conclusory allegations fail to demonstrate that he has experienced any past serious physical

injury, much less show that he is in imminent danger of future serious physical injury. *See Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1950 (2009) (conclusory allegations of unconstitutional conduct without specific factual allegations fail to state a claim under § 1983). Finally, Defendant Michigan Parole Board is part of the Michigan Department of Corrections, which is a department of the State of Michigan. *See* MICH. COMP. LAWS § 791.231a(1). The states and their departments are immune under the Eleventh Amendment from suit in the federal courts. *See Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 98-101 (1984); *Alabama v. Pugh*, 438 U.S. 781, 782 (1978); *Abick v. Michigan*, 803 F.2d 874, 877 (6th Cir. 1986); *Fleming v. Martin*, 24 F. App'x 258, 259 (6th Cir. 2001) (Michigan Parole Board entitled to Eleventh Amendment immunity). Therefore, even if Plaintiff's allegations had adequately alleged that some unknown person places him in imminent danger of serious physical injury, Defendant Michigan Parole Board is not properly sued for that conduct.

In light of the foregoing, § 1915(g) prohibits Plaintiff from proceeding *in forma pauperis* in this action. Plaintiff has twenty-eight (28) days from the date of entry of this order to pay the entire civil action filing fee, which is \$350.00. When Plaintiff pays his filing fee, the Court will screen his complaint as required by 28 U.S.C. § 1915A and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c). If Plaintiff fails to pay the filing fee within the 28-day period, his case will be dismissed without prejudice, but he will continue to be responsible for payment of the \$350.00 filing fee.

Dated: 12/13/2010

/s/ R. Allan Edgar
R. Allan Edgar
United States District Judge

SEND REMITTANCES TO THE FOLLOWING ADDRESS:

Clerk, U.S. District Court
399 Federal Building
110 Michigan Street, NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

All checks or other forms of payment shall be payable to “Clerk, U.S. District Court.”